

Def. Doc. No. 3085

Excerpt from article in The New York Times, 25 January 1941

THE HITLER-STALIN DRAMA AS REVEALED IN THE SECRET NAZI  
DOCUMENTS

The Story of the Fateful Years: 1939-1941

One of the most fateful periods of our times emerged from history into headlines last week when the United States Department of State published a 362-page paper-covered volume, "Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941." This volume is made up of records and documents of the German Foreign Office which were captured in the closing months of the war. What follows is a reconstruction of the history of the period, based on the documents and including salient quotations from them.

By JOHN DESMOND  
and ALLAN TAYLOR

In the spring of 1939 war was in the air. For six years Hitler had been attacking the "degenerate" democracies of the West and even more vehemently Soviet Russia and Communism. For six years he had been on the march in a bloodless (for the Nazis) conquest of Europe. Austria and Czechoslovakia had been overrun; Poland, the Reichsfuehrer had decided, was next on the list. Hermann Goering, Hitler's fat but energetic Air Reichsmarshal, boasted "the German Air Force is the terror of our opponents, and it will remain so.

Hitler had allies.

In Italy Il Duce was boasting that British power in the Mediterranean was forever broken. In 1936 he had added Ethiopia to the Italian Empire. He had just incorporated Albania into the Italian state. He shouted from the Palazzo Venezia: "We regard peace as a catastrophe for civilization and mankind."

In Spain Generalissimo Francisco Franco, newest of the dictators, had just snuffed out, with German and Italian aid, the last resistance of the Loyalist Government.

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(one paragraph omitted)

Strength of the Aggressors

Together these four nations represented only 225,000,000 persons - one-ninth of the world's population - but the world situation favored them. England was just beginning to rearm; France was torn by internal dissension and her military, although numerous, was outmoded. The United States was still strongly isolationist and was beset by domestic problems. Russia's course was uncertain.

Eight months earlier - in the late summer of 1938 - there had seemed to be a chance of a solid front among these nations against aggression by Germany - and Germany's partners.

In September, 1938, Britain's aging Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, went to Munich to confer with Hitler, Mussolini and the French Premier. There the deal was made that gave Germany the Sudetenland (and paved the way for Hitler's occupation of all Czechoslovakia the following March). Chamberlain returned to London to proclaim "peace for our time."

Throughout this period there was one great enigma - Soviet Russia. There were two theories as to the motives of the men in the Kremlin; one, that the Russians, motivated by fear that the Western Powers had given Hitler the "green light" at Munich to attack Russia; would try to come to terms with Germany; the other, that Stalin would take advantage of the tension in Europe to realize Russian Communist and nationalist-imperialist aims. According to this theory Russia would make a deal with Hitler and divide up Eastern Europe.

Hatred of Russia

Hitler had come to power and solidified his hold with the battlecry of "Down with the Communists." He had stated his glowing hatred for Russia in "Mein Kampf"; "Never forget that the rulers of present-day Russia are common blood-stained criminals; that they are the scum of humanity."

But now Hitler was ready to play with "the devil" to realize his aims. He had already set a tentative date for the invasion of Poland. He and his military advisers - like all German militarists in modern times - lived in dread of a two-front war. An alliance with Russia would eliminate that threat.

Thus - in the spring of 1939 - the conditions were ripe for a rapprochement between the two most powerful Continental nations.

THE PACT

At this critical point in the early spring of 1939 the British sent a mission to Moscow to negotiate a defensive alliance against Germany. The talks were protracted, and although no progress was made, there was no sign that the Russians had other plans in mind. Yet it was at this crucial moment that Moscow put out its first cautious feeler to Germany, and thereby started the

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dramatic diplomatic reversal that is now revealed in full detail in the German documents.

On April 17 the Russian Ambassador in Berlin called on Baron Ernst von Weizsaecker, Prussian-born State Secretary of the German Foreign Office. The Russian, Weizsaecker wrote in a memorandum, cautiously dropped a hint that "there is no reason why she (Russia) should not live with us on a normal footing.<sup>2</sup>

The remark was seized upon by the German Foreign Office as a comment of potentially great importance. But Germany waited for a surer clue to Russia's change of mind.

The great clue came suddenly and dramatically on May 3. The Russian newspaper Pravda announced the appointment of a new Foreign Commissar. Maxim Litvinov, the "old internationalist" who had negotiated Russia's entrance into the League of Nations and championed the alliance with the West, was out. Vyacheslav M. Molotov, bourgeois-born but an old-line Communist, was in.

The counselor of the German Embassy in Moscow wired home: "Molotov (no Jew) is held to be the most intimate friend and closest collaborator of Stalin."

There followed weeks of wary jockeying on both sides, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the former champagne salesman who became Hitler's Foreign Minister, took command of the German moves. Goering later said sneeringly of Ribbentrop that he was a Foreign Minister "who knew France only through wine and England through whiskey." Ribbentrop was known to refer to himself as Hitler's "loudspeaker."<sup>2</sup> but he was an opportunist and he sensed the possibility of the greatest diplomatic coup of his career.

#### Interview with Molotov

On May 20, at Foreign Office direction, the German Ambassador to Russia, Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, called on Molotov. Schulenburg was regarded as one of the best trained and equipped of the German diplomats. In the weeks to come he was to be the principal negotiator. He found Molotov cold. Schulenburg reported to the Foreign Office, "Molotov had apparently determined to say just so much and no more. He is known for this somewhat stubborn manner."

In the meantime Molotov was still conferring with the British but the conversations were at arms' length. A few days later Schulenburg wired his Government, "We must be extremely cautious as long as it is not certain that possible proposals from our side will not be used by the Kremlin only to exert pressure on England and France."

Still there was no decisive turn. Through July the talks went on. Hitler's tirades against Poland increased anxiety in an already jittery world. Then, early in August, the tempo quickened. The date was drawing close for his "settlement" with Poland.

On Aug. 14 Ribbentrop sent a long and detailed memorandum to Schulenburg. It instructed him to make an urgent appeal to Molotov for a speedy agreement. Schulenburg carried out his orders. Reading from Ribbentrop's instructions, Schulenburg told Molotov, "The crisis which has been produced in German-Polish relations by English policy \* \* \* (makes) a speedy settlement of German-Russian relations desirable.

#### Soviet Consent

Four anxious days followed. Hitler, ever distrustful of the Russians, fumed; he feared a rebugg by the Russians. On Aug. 18 Ribbentrop again sent Schulenburg to Molotov with the urgent instructions, "The Fuehrer considers it necessary that we be not taken by surprise by the outbreak of a German-Polish conflict while we are striving for a clarification of German-Russian relations."

There was a vague note of warning to Russia in the instruction. Apparently Molotov missed it the same day when he conferred with Schulenburg. The interview was inconclusive. But half an hour after Schulenburg left Molotov he was called back to the Kremlin. Molotov said a Russian draft of a non-aggression pact was ready. Schulenburg could only assume "that Stalin had intervened." At any rate, it was agreed that Ribbentrop should come to Moscow on Aug. 23.

The conferences began early in the evening of Aug. 23 and lasted far into the night. This was the gist of Ribbentrop's report to Hitler:

Many subjects were covered - Japan, Italy, Turkey, England, France and the Anti-Comintern Pact. There was general agreement on most points. For example, Stalin agreed with him that "England was weak and wanted to let others fight for its presumptuous claim to world domination." They laughed over the fright the Anti-Comintern Pact had given "the City of London and the small British merchants." He (Ribbentrop) told a Berlin joke to the effect that "Stalin will yet join the Anti-Comintern Pact." Stalin laughed long. There were many toasts: "To Hitler, to Stalin, to the continued friendship of Germany and Soviet Russia."

The next day the world was stunned when a joint communique announced a ten-year non-aggression pact. The way had been cleared for Hitler's attack on Poland.

#### Secret Protocol

What was not announced but was equally significant was a secret protocol - The Protocol of Aug. 23. This was a document which divided Eastern Europe into Russian and German spheres.

The division between the spheres was a line running from the Baltic to the Black Sea and splitting Poland in halves. Everything east of this line was to be in the Russian sphere. In the north Russia was given a free hand in the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Finland. In the south Russia was to get Bessarabia, which had been annexed after World War I.

Everything west of that line was in the German sphere - though there was no clear definition of the Balkan hegemony, which was later to be a sore point.

The Protocol said: "The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish state and how much a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of future political developments." Until the final decision was made, Russia was to occupy Eastern Poland, Germany Western Poland.

In the pre-dawn of Sept. 1, Hitler personally issued the orders sending his troops into Poland. Two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany. The greatest war of history was on.

#### THE PARTITION

The sweep of the German armies across Poland was swift; swifter than the Germans themselves thought possible. The world saw the first demonstration of Blitzkrieg. On Sept. 3 Ribbentrop wired Schulenburg; "We definitely expect to have Poland beaten in a few weeks. \* \* \* Please discuss this at once with Molotov and see if the Soviet Union does not consider it desirable for Russian forces to move at the proper time against Polish forces."

A week later German vanguards entered Warsaw and Russian incredulity gave way to belief and to apprehension. On Sept. 10 Molotov saw Schulenburg again, and the German Ambassador sent home this message: "Molotov (said) that Soviet Government was taken completely by surprise by the unexpectedly rapid German military successes."

Then Molotov turned to political aspects of the pending military action against Poland. He told Schulenburg that the Soviet Union would have to make some excuse "to make the intervention of the Soviet Union plausible to the masses and at the same time avoid giving the Soviet Union the appearance of an aggressor." The Russian then said, Schulenburg reported, "The Soviet Government \* \* \* intended \* \* \* to declare that Poland was falling apart and that it was necessary for the Soviet Union \* \* \* to come to the aid of the Ukrainians and White Russians 'threatened' by Germany."

Now the time for action by Russia was at hand. At 2 A.M. Sept. 17, Stalin summoned Schulenburg to the Kremlin and told him that "the Red Army would cross the Soviet Border at 6 A.M. this morning." Russia took over the eastern half of Poland.

The Russians seemed eager to settle the Polish business as rapidly as possible. On Sept. 27 Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow. The conferences continued through the morning of Sept. 29.

In the agreements the Russians seemed to have the best of the bargain! The secret protocol of Aug. 23 was put into effect, with exceptions provided for in a new "Secret Protocol of Sept. 28." Under the new protocol Lithuania was transferred from the German to the Russian sphere, and in compensation there was an adjustment of the new Russian-German frontier in Poland in Germany's favor.

Moreover, the Russians, in a formal declaration, gave Germany moral support for her coming "peace offensive." The declaration said: "In case of continuation of the war, the Governments \* \* \* shall engage in mutual consultations with regard to necessary measures."

Ribbentrop returned to Berlin not entirely satisfied with the Moscow settlements. But this dissatisfaction was tempered by the hope that - with the vaguely hinted prospect of a Russian-German alliance - the "peace offensive" might be successful. There would be time later to deal with Russia.

For Russia, the Moscow talks had paid off handsomely. The Russians had added thousands of square miles to their territory. They had a free hand - which they were soon to take advantage of - in the Baltic. They had restored much of the Polish territory they had lost in World War I. Finally, in case Germany turned on them, they were in a better position for defense than they had been before.

### THE COLLING, ET

The first phase of Russian-German cooperation was over. As the second phase began there were signs of suspicions on both sides. Germany went ahead with her plans to talk and propagandize the West into submission. Russia began the systematic effort to make the most of her Baltic sphere, and Germany viewed her moves with distrust.

On Oct. 3, 1939, when Molotov proposed a gesture toward Lithuania, under the Secret Protocol of Sept. 28, Schulenburg said: "Molotov's suggestion seems to me harmful, as in the eye of the world it would make us appear as 'robbers' of Lithuanian territory, while the Soviet Union figures as the donor."

Russia made demands on Finland for bases and territory. Finland rejected them. Russia invaded Finland on Nov. 30. Germany was silent. In France and England some saw a chance to aid the Finns and thus start an offensive that eventually might be turned against Germany. Volunteers were recruited, funds were raised. There was talk of an Anglo-French expedition to help Finland. Germany was not displeased, because these developments seemed likely to curb the Russians, at least temporarily.

### Campaign in Finland

Over the winter the Russians made little headway against the Finns. The Russian losses were heavy, the Finns' relatively light. There were contemptuous reports that Germany was growing lukewarm toward her partner. On March 12, 1940, Finland surrendered.

On April 9 Schulenburg told Molotov of the invasion, that morning, of Scandinavia. Schulenburg's report of the conversation said: "Mr. Molotov said literally: 'We wish the Germans complete success.'"

By the end of April the Scandinavian conquest was virtually over. Hitler was ready for his next move. On the morning of May 10 Schulenburg again called on Molotov and informed him of the invasion that morning of the Lowlands, "because of the impending Anglo-French push on the Ruhr region by way of Belgium and Holland."

The Nazi Blitzkrieg against the West amazed the world. In early June the British made their heroic evacuation of Dunkerque. On June 10 Italy entered the war - "the stab in the back" Roosevelt called it. The Russians were plainly scared. They had

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counted on a long campaign in the West. Now Hitler seemed on the verge of complete victory and Russia might be his next target.

On June 14 Weizsaecker at the Foreign Office wired Schulenburg at Moscow this confidential message:

Secret Report.

"From a strictly secret source with which you are acquainted it has come to our knowledge that the Soviet Minister in Stockholm, Frau Kollontay, recently stated to the Belgian Minister there that it was to the common interest of the European powers to place themselves in opposition to German imperialism."

During the German drive the Russians had collected final dividends on the Protocol of Aug. 23, 1939. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were fully incorporated into the Soviet Union. Bessarabia was detached from Rumania and added to Russia.

Now in the summer and early autumn of 1940, came the "Battle of Britain" when Hitler tried to bomb England out of the war.

The Kremlin watched intently. Would Hitler try to invade England? If not, where else were the destructive energies of his fighting machine to be employed? Russia speeded up her industries, strengthened the Red Army and consolidated her gains against the day of need.

By mid-September, 1940, it was clear that the air blitz against Britain had failed. Hitler turned his eyes back again to the East. On Nov. 12, an event of great significance took place.

On that day Molotov and Hitler had a fateful meeting in Berlin. Germany had long pressed for the Molotov visit, partly because it was considered a required diplomatic courtesy in return for Ribbentrop's two trips to Moscow the year before. It was Molotov's first journey outside of Russia. It was his first and last meeting with Hitler. Apparently there had been little preparation for the conference. Hitler wanted Molotov to sign a four-power treaty - Germany, Russia, Italy and Japan - to divide up the world. Molotov balked. He was afraid of a double-cross by any or all of the other three.

The conference was a failure. Molotov and Hitler did not get along either diplomatically or personally. Later the clever von Papen declared that it was at this meeting that Germany lost the war.

THE BREAK

As 1940 drew to its end Hitler stood victorious in the west, but he had not eliminated Britain. What if Russia then turned against him? He was still haunted by the spectre of a two-front war.

In his massive Berlin Chancellery and his eyrie at Berchtesgaden he pondered the alternatives, reached a decision. He would smash Russia while his hands were still free in the west.

On Dec. 18, 1940, he issued a top secret "Fuehrer's Directive" for Operation Barbarossa, one of history's most grandiose military plans. It was a project aimed at the destruction, with some help from Finland and Rumania, of the Red Army along a 2,000-mile front, and the occupation of all Russia west of the Volga. The time was not set. Great secrecy was enjoined. "It is to be considered of decisive importance," warned the directive, "that the intention to attack is not discovered."

Before the blow could be launched it would be necessary for Hitler to guard his southern flank by strengthening Germany's position in the Balkans. In Moscow there was growing suspicion over Hitler's plans.

On Jan. 17, 1941, Schulenburg sent this report of a statement by Molotov: "According to all reports available here, German troops in great numbers were concentrated in Rumania and ready to march into Bulgaria, Greece and the Straits. There was no doubt that England would try to forestall the operations \* \*. The Soviet Government regarded it as its duty to call attention to the fact that it would consider the appearance of any armed forces on the territory of Bulgaria and the Straits as a violation of the Security interests of the U.S.S.R."

Ribbentrop replied through the Foreign Office: "It is t unalterable intention of the Reich Government not under any circumstances to permit English military forces to establish themselves on Greek territory."

Events in the Balkans were drawing rapidly to a crisis. Rumania, Hungary and ~~xxx~~ Bulgaria were already in the German camp, and the Nazis were fast slipping their net around Yugoslavia. But on March 27 the Yugoslav revolution swept from power the subservient government of Prince Paul. The Yugoslavs were ready to fight for independence.

### Hitler and the World

At this time Hitler, with his long-range plans of smashing Russia and going on to world power, began negotiations with Japan. On March 27 he began a series of conversations in Berlin with dapper Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka. Hitler urged the Japanese to take aggressive action and promised to fight Russia and the United States if either became involved in war with Japan. A memorandum of the conversations revealed the line he took:

"Germany was watching the Soviet Union closely and - this Matsuoka should realize clearly - she was prepared for any eventuality. Germany would not provoke Russia; but if the policy of Stalin was not in harmony with what the Fuehrer considered to be right, he would crush Russia."

On April 4 Moscow sprang a surprise. Molotov summoned Schulenburg and informed him of a Russo-Yugoslav friendship and non-aggressive pact to be signed immediately. He quoted Molotov to this effect: "In its decision \* \* \* the Soviet Government had been actuated solely by the desire to preserve peace. It knew that in this desire it was in harmony with the Reich Government, which was likewise opposed to an extension of the war."

"I replied to Molotov," wrote the German Ambassador, "that in my estimation the moment chosen by the Soviet Union for the negotiation of such a treaty had been very unfortunate. \* \* \* The policy of the Yugoslav Government was entirely unclear, and its attitude \* \* \* toward Germany was challenging."

Two days later the German war machine struck at both Greece and Yugoslavia. Schulenburg was directed to inform Molotov of the strokes, giving the usual excuse of the danger of British invasion of the Balkans. He reported to Berlin ~~tx~~ the effect of the news:

"After I had made to Molotov the communications prescribed he repeated several times that it was extremely deplorable. \* \* \*

### Showdown at Hand.

The time for unmasking was near. From this point on there was a rapid deterioration in even the outward aspects of partnership. Soon Russia was protesting sharply over alleged violations by German planes of the Soviet boundary. In turn the German High Command complained to the Foreign Office of "almost daily" border violations by Soviet planes.

By this time the eight weeks of special preparations allotted in the Fuehrer's secret directive for war with Russia were already under way. Rumors mounted of Russian and German troop concentrations along the borders. Spring turned into fateful summer.

On June 22, 1941, came the dramatic climax to the diplomatic subterfuges of the two-year "partnership." Ribbentrop directed Schulenburg to see Molotov at once and present him a declaration.

It contained a point-by-point indictment of Russia for various alleged infractions of the non-aggression agreement, including subversive activities against Germany, the spreading of Soviet military might westward whenever possible and attempts to carry bolshevism further into Europe.

#### Order to Attack

In summation, it stated:

"The Fuehrer has therefore ordered the German Armed Forces to oppose this threat with all the means at their disposal."

At dawn the next morning the armed might of Germany - 180 divisions - launched Hitler's great drive into the fastnesses of Russia. The great drama of slaughter and destruction that in the end was to bring death to Hitler and ruin to Germany had begun.

But at the time the Fuehrer seemed to have little doubt of a successful outcome. In a letter to Il Duce he assessed the situation optimistically, though frankly admitting he had embarked on a tremendous task. He had at last done something he had long wanted to do.

"In conclusion," he wrote, "let me say one more thing, Duce. Since I struggled through to this decision, I again feel spiritually free. The partnership with the Soviet Union, in spite of the complete sincerity to bring about a final conclusion, was nevertheless often very irksome to me, for in some way or other it seemed to me to be a break with my whole origin, my concepts, and my former obligations. I am happy now to be relieved of these mental agonies."